

The Red Button

BY Will Irwin

AUTHOR OF THE CITY THAT WAS, ETC.

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SYNOPSIS.

Tommy North, returning to his room in Mrs. Moore's boarding house at 123 a. m., discovers the body of Capt. John Hanks, another resident, with a knife wound on his breast. Suspicion rests upon a man giving the name of Lawrence Wade, who had called on Hanks in the evening and had been heard quarreling with Hanks. During the excitement a strange woman who gives her name as Rosalie LeGrange, appears and takes into her own home across the street all of Mrs. Moore's boarders, including Miss Estrilla, an invalid, who was confined to the room she occupied and whose brother was a favorite among the other boarders. Wade is arrested as he is about to leave the room. Mrs. LeGrange, who, while playing her trade as a trance medium, had aided Police Inspector McGee several times, calls at his office to tell what she knows of the crime. While she is there, Lawrence Hanks, widow of the murdered man, whose existence had been on Green, appears. Mrs. Hanks, who had left her husband and disobeys the fact that Wade represented her and visited Hanks on the night of the murder in an effort to settle their affairs. She admits Wade was in love with her. Wade is held by the coroner's jury for the death of Hanks. Tommy North, who had been held by the police, is released and returns to Mrs. LeGrange's house. He becomes infatuated at once with Betty Barbara. Driven by the belief that Betty Barbara loves Estrilla Tommy North gets drunk and is discovered by Betty Barbara. The next morning Tommy apologizes to Betty Barbara and at her urging proposes to establish the Thomas W. North Advertising Agency.

CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

"That's easy," said he. "They opened the window. It was raining, wasn't it? Well, the rain came in and stained it."

"I suppose so," said Rosalie. But she made a minute examination. Let me violate for a second the privacy of her mind. "Dear old dope!" It was saying, "he hasn't thought to look into the weather that night. He don't know it had cleared up and stopped raining for good when I came into the house, and I saw them open the windows myself."

"Well," she said aloud, "that's all for the bed. Now let's see the furniture on his clothes and everything."

It was half an hour before Rosalie finished her search of the room. She went over it inch by inch, her lips pursed, her hands making quick flicks of disgust over the dirt and disorder. She spoke little, and then as though to herself, Inspector McGee, finally, gave up following her swift movements, mental and physical, and rested himself in a Morris chair. This was a life of grim hard things; these surroundings, depressing even to Rosalie, were to him part of the day's work. And so he fell to watching not the search for evidence but the figure of Rosalie LeGrange. There was something pleasing, and more than pleasing, about this woman here. He remembered how she had appeared to him ten years ago, when she began flashing in and out of his life. He had been sitting in another house of murder, and he had seen her cross the street. He had marked her then as "a peach"—a little too plump for his idea of beauty, but pretty nevertheless. She had brown hair then, and those big gray eyes. The eyes remained as they were, but there was a foam of white across her hair. The face had fallen into a delicate ridge here and there, though massage had taken care of the wrinkles, which showed not as yet. Her figure had broadened a little—yet she still bore it wonderfully. The skin of her long plump hands had begun to gather about the knuckles. And still—she appealed to him as she had nev-



It Was a Red Shoe Button.

or appealed in those first days. He had no great amount of imagination; but what he had soared and took flight. Suppose—then—when they were both young—

The flight stopped there; the bird of imagination fluttered to earth, killed by an arrow of memory. This was—had always been—a medium, a professional faker. In their early acquaintance she had duped even him. She was next door to a crook; and he dwelt so close to crooks as to have his tolerances, but also his prejudices. No, she wasn't the kind for a man. But it was a pity. The broad, sturdy police bosom of Martin McGee heaved with a sigh.

The sigh did not escape Rosalie LeGrange; little in her surroundings ever escaped her. She appeared to come out of her thoughtful mood, and her lips flashed.

"Getting tired?" she asked.

"No," he said. And then suddenly: "Rose, why did you ever start it?"

"Being a medium, you mean?"

"Yes. The word was out of his lips before wonder entered his mind.

"Now, how did you get that—what I was thinking of? You make me wonder if there ain't something in your mediumship."

"Well," said Rosalie. "When you're left an orphan at twelve—there ain't much choice. Professor Vango adopted me—my mother was in his circle. Old fake! But he had mediumship, too; an' he thought, an' I thought, he brought somethin' out of me. Anyhow, I saw things. So I became a medium. Like you became a cop—because it happened that way. Sometimes," added Rosalie, drawing all sting from her words by a flash of her dimples, "I think you're awful stupid, Martin McGee, an' sometimes I think you're a wonder. It's generally according to whether or no you agree with me. As you mostly do, I generally call you a wonder. An' you've got get there besides. Slow, but you do get there."

This bit of conversation fulfilled Rosalie's purpose. It turned the subject from herself to Inspector McGee's self; and she knew from a life of experience that no man lives who can resist that lure.

"How do you feel about me today?" he asked with heavy male coquetry.

"I haven't made up my mind today," she said, "but it's veerin' toward the stupid." She crossed the room and fumbled with the catch of the south window. He rose heavily to help her.

"No, thank you!" she said. "No, thank you. I want to look over this fire escape. I'm that old I can't go up modest-like. It's enough to have the stenographers rubbering from these windows, without you."

However, she managed with surprising lightness the step from the window to the iron stairway, with astonishing grace the ascent. She threaded it to its top, viewing it all in a general way. Then she stopped, making a picture of herself as she balanced on the landing, and pulled out a wire hairpin. This universal implement of the sex she twisted to suit her purpose, and began a slow descent, picking at the interstices of the iron.

So she worked downward nearly one flight before she came to a cake of dirt in a corner of the iron steps. She brushed it away and discovered a little irregularity in the metal. She picked at this with her twisted hairpin. It proved to be a loop of steel, somewhat spotted, but still bright. She hooked the pin into the loop, and pulled. Something gave way. Out of a very small hollow in the iron step, which seemed like a bubble left in the process of casting, came a little hard ball. She rubbed it with her hands, and polished it with her handkerchief.

It was a red shoe button.

Rosalie fingered it, and glanced upward, musing. Above, the iron stairway ran straight to the windows of the lumber room. And that was the only window from which it could have fallen in such fashion as to strike the fire escape. She knew from Mrs. Moore that this room had been used for storage during all of the last year. If a previous tenant dropped it, the lacquer would be gone or tarnished by now. The other windows on the fourth floor were cut off from view of the fire escape by an irregularity of the wall. From those windows, one could scarcely have thrown the button and hit that spot on the fire escape—let alone droppin' it," thought Rosalie.

Rosalie wrapped the button in her handkerchief and continued her search. Nothing heavier than straws and scraps of paper.

"Well, you never can tell," she said to herself as she straightened up on the landing before Captain Hanks's window; "let's see—who in my house ever wears—"

She stopped all motion here; and since there was no need for concealment, her face showed the shock which she felt. Her eyes widened; her jaw dropped.

"Um-hum!" she buzzed with the tone of one who gathers the straws of suspicion into a sheaf of fact.

"Um-hum!"

And just then the voice of Inspector McGee boomed from within.

"Pretty near through?" he asked.

"Much as I want," replied Rosalie, voice and face falling at once into indifference. "Is there a place to wash in this house? Water ain't turned off yet? All right."

When, ten minutes later, she returned from the lavatory, marvelously freshened in appearance, the inspector awaited her in the lower hall.

"I may be wanting to come again," she said. "Will you let the cops know?"

"Well, how do I talk today?" asked Martin McGee, "smart or stupid?"

"Kind of between," jabbed Rosalie, "but edgin' toward stupid still." She smiled again over her shoulder; a dimple played and then another; a lock of hair fell from its fastening over her cheek.

And suddenly something happened; something which Martin McGee, blushing over it later in silence and secrecy, could not himself account for. With the motion of a dancing bear, an evi-

ward was it and yet so quick, he had caught her in his arms and kissed her heavily on the face.

Rosalie did not seem to struggle; yet somehow, without haste, without disarranging herself in one little item, she was free of him. The surge in Martin McGee receded as rapidly as it had risen. He stood blank, his color thickening.

"Martin McGee," said Rosalie LeGrange, "you jest cut that out!"

CHAPTER IX.

Moving the Pawna.

At breakfast next morning, Rosalie opened her game—opened it like a master of human chessmen, with a trifling move or two of the pawna.

"Don't any of you people be astonished," she said, "if your clothes look strange and orderly when you get home tonight. This is my day for cleaning closets. I announce now that if I find anything left hung where it ought to be, I'm going to set it right."

When they were gone, Rosalie LeGrange, refusing assistance from Mrs.



"What Do Your Spirits Say to You?"

Moore, put on dust-cap and long apron and made good her word. But she did more than clean. From Miss Harding's apartment on the ground floor to Miss Estrilla's on the top, she examined minutely every garment and every pair of shoes. When she had finished, when she stood in her own room dressing for the street, she looked very serious. Before she put away her house-dress, she took from its pocket the red shoe button. She inspected it again, and locked it away in the deepest compartment of her jewel case.

Rosalie walked briskly to a bookstore in the heart of the foreign district, held short consultation with the clerk, journeyed another block, and stood at length before a sign lettered in many tongues. She hesitated and began talking to herself.

"You can't teach an old dog new tricks," she remarked.

"But sometimes you can brush up the old tricks he used to know," she added. "It'll take time—well, anyway, I'm here!" and she entered.

When she emerged, it lacked but half an hour for lunch time. At the table, she made subtle inquiry about the plans of her boarders for the day. Mr. North, already busy with his agency, had not come home to lunch at all. Betty Barbara had an engagement to help him select furniture. Constance must spend the afternoon with her lawyers. Professor Noll intended to read a paper at the Health Food conference. Miss Harding and Miss Jones never came home between breakfast and dinner time.

"Now's my chance—while the house is empty an' my nerve's good," she said to herself as the boarders departed.

Forthwith, Rosalie moved a major piece. She mounted the stairs toward Miss Estrilla's room. She was behaving strangely. Her eyes looked far away. Her manner seemed remote to the things of this world. As she knocked and entered, she passed her hand over her eyes, gave a little convulsive jerk, dropped her hand to her side, and shook herself.

Miss Estrilla lay back among the cushions in half-light. She seemed to catch the strange new manner of Rosalie.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

Rosalie did not answer at once. She gave a little stagger, sank down in a chair, and began to murmur inarticulate syllables in a low and rather husky voice.

"What has happened?" asked Miss Estrilla again; and she spoke in real alarm.

Rosalie sat upright as with great effort. Once or twice her hands clasped and unclasped.

"Give me that glass of water," she said in a half-whisper. She drank; she wet her fingers and dabbed her temples.

"Are you ill? Shall I send for some one?" repeated Miss Estrilla.

"I'm better now," replied Rosalie in a firm but rather sleepy voice. "I'm cruel to frighten you. But listen. I'm in trouble in a way—at this, Miss Es-



trilla settled back as though relieved, somehow—"an' I've just got to ask for your help. Now please don't be scared. It's really nothin'—only—well, I've got to tell about it, I guess." All the weariness of the world was in that last phrase. "I git took this way sometimes. There's nothin' dreadful about it when folks understand. Don't call anybody, please don't. Jest stay where you are. In a minute, I'll be goin' out of myself—unconscious, you know. I'll talk, probably. I may thrash around a little. By an' by, I'll stop talkin' an' be perfectly quiet—" Here Rosalie shuddered three or four times again, impersonated an effort of the will, and went on: "Don't do anything to me while I'm talkin'. But after I'm done an' lay quiet, wait five minutes. Then if I don't come to, sprinkle water in my face, shake me—anything an'—don't—tell—anybody—" These last words died away in a crooning undertone. Rosalie sank deeper into her chair. Her eyes fixed on the distance. Gradually, her lids fell. So she rested for some time, immobile. Miss Estrilla, sitting up on her couch, watched Rosalie intently. Now and then, Rosalie noted, her breathing came in irregular little catches. From the cover of her long eyelashes, beat instrument of her trade, Rosalie stole a glance which took in this constrained attitude. She let her lids droop to a full close.

"Ugh—oh—ugh!" went Rosalie's voice finally; and at the deep tone, so unlike Rosalie's accustomed silvery accents, Miss Estrilla started.

"Doctor Carver!"—it was a deep male voice which proceeded from Rosalie's entranced lips; this male voice of her had been the envy of her old contemporaries—"a—ah! Doctor Carver, I come to speak of a young man. I see him near this place. I see a struggle about him. I see a glass of liquor on one side of him and a woman's hand on the other. He is drawing toward the woman's hands. I see her more clearly now. She has golden hair. I see him working far into the night. His hand is writing—ugh—" This was a kind of shuddering groan. "I am going!" Another silence. Then a light flute-like voice—the accustomed tone of Laughing-Eyes, Rosalie's famous child control, and the most artistic thing she did.

"Flowers for a pretty lady!" came the voice of Laughing-Eyes. "Pretty lady is sick. Pretty lady is crying. It's bright here. And the spirits talk to me. One, two, three spirits talk to Laughing-Eyes. One of them wants the pretty lady—oh, he's gone! He is weak. I am weak—good-by—pretty—" Rosalie's lips closed, and she settled down as though into deeper sleep. She waited through a space which seemed eternity. Presently she heard a rustling from the bed. Miss Estrilla had moved. Rosalie braced herself within in for the shock of cold water. But Miss Estrilla only shook her. Rosalie made a sleepy motion and became still. Miss Estrilla shook her again, and called into her ear.

"Madame LeGrange—wake up!" This time, Rosalie permitted her eyes to open. She stared a moment as at things remote, fetched another shudder, sat bolt upright. Her first expression was bewildered; her second startled. There followed every appearance of embarrassment and chagrin.

"Oh, what has happened?" she said.

"Don't you know?" asked Miss Estrilla, regarding her narrowly.

"I remember coming in here," said Rosalie, "an' I remember telling you that I might go out—fall asleep." She arose at this and began nervously to pace the room.

"(TO BE CONTINUED.)"



HOW TO PLACE THE MIRROR

One Should Be Hung in a Dark Hall Where It Will Serve a Triple Purpose.

Always place a mirror in a dark hall. If it can be so placed that it reflects the opening into the living or drawingroom, it will serve a triple purpose—it will be a convenience to the guests and members of the family when they are starting out, it will increase the light and it will make the hall seem bigger.

In a living room place several mirrors, if the room is dark. Place them in rather unexpected places. A long narrow mirror can be hung lengthwise, perhaps in a corner beside a door. Another mirror can be placed on a wall opposite a window and so will reflect the garden or trees or sea or street and give the room apparently another window. Another mirror can be placed at such an angle that it will not necessarily reflect the people sitting about the fire. The object of living room mirrors is not to give reflections of the persons in the room, and such reflections are sometimes annoying.

"I've got to apologize," she went on. "I am—well, the last time I was took this way, I went to my own room. When I came to, it was dark—the servants thought I'd gone away an' forgot to come home to dinner. I made up my mind I wouldn't let it happen again like that—an' you were the only person in the house. Was I out—sleep—long?"

"About six or seven minutes, I think," said Miss Estrilla. Suddenly she covered her eyes with their green shade.

"What does it mean, all this?" she asked.

"Poor dear, I believe I must have bothered you with my talking—if I did talk." She approached the bed, and sat down.

"Now I'm goin' to tell you all about it," pursued Rosalie. "I must, of course. It ain't right not to explain, now I've made this scene. But you'll be the only livin' soul around the house that knows a thing, an' you'll understand what I mean when I'm through. Comin' right out with it, I've been a medium—a spirit medium—all my life. You know what that is, don't you?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Didn't know but you mightn't. Some folks don't, an' some hold a low opinion of 'em. I do myself." Rosalie paused. "That was why I cut it out, maybe—that and the feelin' that my powers was goin'. Well, one day comes a legacy—money I'd never counted on or expected. An' that happened jest when it seemed like my power had grown weak an' I had to quit or be a fake—because when people come an' pay you two dollars you have to deliver answers or you'll git no more custom. So I jest determined to drop it all an' go to keepin' boarders with my money."

Rosalie made the proper dramatic pause here, and let her voice fall.

"You can't do a thing all your life, though, an' stop it right away. I hadn't counted on that. I never could control my trances exactly. They had a way of comin' when they wanted to. You can hold it off for a while, an' then—it's like holdin' off sleep. Twice before this week it's happened—I've told you what I did the second time, an' how it scared me. An' just now, standin' in the hall, I felt it comin' on—strong. You know the rest. An' I hope you'll excuse me—an' you won't say a thing, will you?" Rosalie's voice held all the pleading in the world.

Miss Estrilla, expressionless behind her green shade, spoke in an even and unemotional voice.

"And what do your spirits say to you?"

"To me!" replied Rosalie; "goodness, I don't know. I wish I did. I have to find afterwards from other people what I said or did. Well, I'm as sorry as can be that I bothered you, an' won't do it again, if I can help it. Did I talk much?"

"Not a great deal. Something about a young man and a young woman."

"Anybody in the house? Sometimes they tell me—my spirits talk about folks a thousand miles away an' sometimes about folks that are right here."

Miss Estrilla seemed to be considering this. When she spoke, her voice was still even and perfectly controlled; but she did not answer the question.

"You have been very kind," she said, "and I don't see why you should tell any one else. You may come here whenever you feel that way. It would be a pleasure to return your kindness."

Rosalie sighed as in relief.

"My! That's good. I didn't want to ask—it's a lot to ask of anybody—but now you've offered, I'll take it. I've been thinkin' lately it would be a good thing to let go of myself when I feel it comin', an' get it off my system. Was that the bell? Excuse me—I ain't sure that lazy Molly will answer it.—An' thank you, my dear."

The bell was only a peddler. When Rosalie had disposed of him, she consulted her watch. Much remained of the afternoon.

"Good time to git in an hour's session with that darned phonograph," she said; and she took refuge in her own big clothes-closet—which, experiment had shown, was sound-proof.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Paw Knows Everything.

Willie—Paw, what is a piece of resistance?

Paw—A steak after your mother gets through fryin' it, my son.

Maw—You go to bed, Willie.

Living Up to Theory.

"He never spans his son, does he?"

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